

## LAND USE SCENARIO

**PROBLEM:** Towns get most of their revenue by taxing property based on its fair market value. Some try to keep taxes low by encouraging new development, which potentially expands tax rolls but could also change a town's character.

A **development partnership** proposes building two big box stores on the site of an abandoned and contaminated state facility in a remote part of a small rural town. It proposes to:

- Clean up the hazardous waste.
- Pay for all necessary roadwork and other infrastructure improvements.
- Give 25% of the work to small minority- and women-owned businesses.
- Create at least 100 new jobs and train unemployed workers to fill them.

The partnership is asking **the state** for help. It wants to (1) acquire the site from the state and (2) receive urban and industrial sites reinvestment tax credits for the project. Both actions require the **legislature's** approval.

The project looks like a good fit for the town, which suffers from high unemployment, stagnant grand list growth, and escalating municipal costs. The regional chamber of commerce believes it will attract more business to the region and contractors and building trade unions welcome the opportunity to work, but others see it differently:

- **Local merchants** fear the big stores will ruin them.
- **Older residents** fear increased traffic and more retail development.
- **Environmentalists** fear more air pollution and stormwater runoff.
- Some **trade unions** claim national retailers are anti-union and pay relatively low wages while others look forward to the construction work the project will entail.

**Municipal leaders** are split, some claiming the town needs an economic shot in the arm while others want to improve the existing Main Street area. **The planning and zoning commission** says the project conforms to the town's development plan and is allowed under a special permit zoning regulation.

Approving real estate development projects is largely a local matter, but this proposal involves the **Legislature and the state Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD)**. The merchants and some residents want the legislature to require binding referenda on proposed big box projects. Moreover, **the first selectman** wants the legislature to designate the project site an enterprise zone, thus qualifying the developer for the state reimbursed property tax exemptions DECD administers.

**Players:** The development partnership, local merchants, long-term residents, conservationists, union officials, planning and zoning commissioners, the first selectman, historic preservationists, the DECD commissioner, and state legislators.

**Questions:** How do you, as a **legislator**, see your role? Will you sponsor a binding referendum bill? Will you vote for the state property transfer and tax credits?